ON Your Mark

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On Your Mark is a monthly column written by Geoffrey Peckham, CEO of Clarion Safety Systems and chair of both the ANSI Z535 Committee and the U.S. Technical Advisory Group to ISO Technical Committee 145- Graphical Symbols. Over the past two decades he has played a pivotal role in the harmonization of U.S. and international standards dealing with safety signs, colors, formats and symbols. This article is courtesy of Clarion Safety Systems © 2012. All rights reserved.

Kitting

Implementing a Systems Approach to Safety Label Inventory

BY GEOFFREY PECKHAM

In this column, we'll discuss one way to carry out a systems approach to safety: label 'kits'.

You may recall that, in one of my prior articles in the *On Your Mark* series ("It's Not a Bunch of Labels – It's a System", December 2012), we explored how it can be beneficial not to look at product safety labeling singularly, but as part of a larger picture of safety. We introduced the concept of safety labels functioning as a system – a safety communication system – in order to most effectively improve safety and reduce liability. It's one thing to learn about and understand this systems approach to labeling and quite another to implement it. This is where the concept of kitting comes into play.

Those who work in the field of product safety engineering should be aware that more and more companies are turning to kitting as a solution to some significant liability and safety issues related to the installation of product safety labels. What is kitting? Kits are a means to bring together all of the safety labels needed for a specific product or piece of equipment, place them in one package, and give the package a single part number. The actual kitting of the labels takes

At left, multiple on-product safety labels reinforce each other, working as a "system" to convey essential safety messages. At right, a typical kit of safety labels. (Label designs ©Clarion Safety Systems.)

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place at your label printer's facility so your labels arrive to your company as complete packages to be installed, one per product. By ordering your labels delivered in this way, your kits support your systems approach to labeling. Since multiple safety labels are often placed on products, kitting allows the group of labels you select for your product to be easily understood as a system.

What are the benefits of this approach? First, kits allow the ordering and inventorying of your safety labels to be dramatically simplified. When you implement a kitting approach to specifying your safety labels, you order and inventory a single kit part number rather than a wide number of individual label part numbers. This, in turn, provides cost savings in inventory management by reducing the items that need to be managed; it significantly decreases the time it takes to inventory labels into your parts department and the time it takes to retrieve labels when called for by manufacturing.

These are all valid advantages from your purchasing agent's perspective. But there is a second reason for kitting that goes over and above inventory cost reduction. As a product safety engineering professional, kits improve safety by ensuring that each of the essential safety labels you specify on your engineering drawings are actually picked from inventory and installed. Creating a kit of the labels needed for each product or project is a way to ensure that your exact specifications for on-product safety messages are carried out. From a product liability perspective, you are better able to point to the additional control measure kitting gives you for assuring that your engineering drawing specifications for labels are carried out. On a side note, even with kitting, I highly recommend that you take photographs of your products before they leave the door as evidence that all guards and safety labels were installed. Of course this suggested step may be impractical if you produce a large number of products. But if you are able to do this, the photographs will serve as important documentation if an accident occurs, proving that all safety measures were properly installed before your product left your control.

Implementing a systems approach to safety labeling is a multifaceted task which can help to improve safety and reduce liability. Consider thinking outside the box – or in the case of kitting, inside the bag – to make improved safety measures easier to implement across your product lines and across your organization. Be sure to pass the concept of kitting along to your purchasing department as it could significantly help them with the chore of correctly ordering these critical component parts. It is highly likely that kitting will save your organization money. But, more importantly, it can help you to protect people from harm and potentially save lives.

For more information on kitting, visit www.clarionsafety.com.